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Review of the efficiency of the administrative and financial functioning of the United Nations

Vacant posts in the Office of Internal Oversight Services

Report of the Independent Audit Advisory Committee

Summary

The present report reflects the observations and recommendations of the Independent Audit Advisory Committee on the issue of the high number of vacant posts in the Office of Internal Oversight Services. The issue was discussed at the fifth session of the Committee, held from 17 to 19 February 2009, and it was decided that, with regard to the issue, the Committee would exercise its responsibility, in accordance with its terms of reference, to report key findings and matters of importance to the Assembly at any time.

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Background

1. The responsibilities of the Independent Audit Advisory Committee, as set out in its terms of reference (resolution 61/275, annex), include the responsibility to advise the Assembly on the effectiveness, efficiency and impact of the audit activities and other oversight functions of the Office of Internal Oversight Services.

2. It came to the attention of the Committee at its fifth session, held from 17 to 19 February 2009, that the Office of Internal Oversight Services had vacancies for over 27 per cent of its authorized posts. The vacancies are at various stages in the extensive United Nations recruitment process. The Committee notes that the General Assembly also raised the issue in its resolution 63/265, in which it expressed concern over a number of vacancies in the Investigations Division of the Office of Internal Oversight Services since the beginning of 2008, and requested the Secretary-General to make every effort to fill those vacancies as a matter of priority, in accordance with the existing relevant provisions governing recruitment in the United Nations.

3. Of particular concern to the Committee is the fact that all three Director-level positions within the Office of Internal Oversight Services are vacant and are currently encumbered by staff appointed in an acting capacity. In this regard, the Under-Secretary-General for Internal Oversight Services, in a letter dated 19 December 2008, brought the issue of the recruitment of the Director of the Investigations Division to the attention of the Committee for advice and comment.

4. The Committee's observations and recommendations are generally incorporated in an annual report or other reports on the budget of the Office of Internal Oversight Services. However, when issues of significant concern emerge, the Committee, in accordance with its terms of reference, has a responsibility to report key findings and matters of importance to the Assembly at any time.

Observations and recommendations

5. The Committee's main concern is that the high vacancy rate within the Office of Internal Oversight Services will have an adverse impact on the capacity and ability of the Office to accomplish its programme of work. The programme of work is risk-based, which means that if the workplan is not completed, certain risks in the Organization may not be covered by the Office.

6. Given the length of time that recruiting staff to posts appears to take, there is a risk that the programme of work of the Office may not be accomplished owing to insufficient staff capacity. The Committee believes that this is a serious concern in terms of the effectiveness of the Office.

7. Taking into account the concern of the General Assembly as stated in its resolution 63/265, the Committee advises that all possibilities within the United Nations regulations and rules be explored, including the judicious use of temporary staff to minimize the adverse impact of vacant posts on the completion of the programme of work of the Office of Internal Oversight Services.

8. There is disagreement between management and the Office of Internal Oversight Services regarding the appropriate recruitment and selection process for

posts at the Director level. The current contention involves the recruitment and selection process for the Director of the Investigations Division.

9. The Committee is concerned that the Investigations Division is at a point at which strong leadership and management are critical: 175 cases have been transferred to the Investigations Division from the Procurement Task Force, and a major restructuring of the Division is awaiting a final decision by the General Assembly. Therefore, the Committee believes that there should be a streamlined and expedited process for filling this post. In this respect, the Committee notes the decision of the General Assembly to provide "operational independence" to the Office of Internal Oversight Services under resolution 48/218 B and the Secretary-General's delegation of authority contained in administrative instruction ST/AI/401 of January 1995, which, inter alia, provides that "the Under-Secretary-General for Internal Oversight Services will have authority to appoint all staff members whose appointments are limited to service with the Office up to the D-2 level".

10. In this regard, the Committee has provided advice to assist in the resolution of the matter. However, to date the matter remains unresolved. The Committee remains available to provide further assistance, as required.

11. After careful consideration of this matter by the Committee and in the light of the above-mentioned concerns, the Committee unanimously agreed to bring the issue of the high number of vacant posts in the Office of Internal Oversight Services and, in particular, that of Director of the Investigations Division, to the attention of the General Assembly. **The Committee urges that, in the Organization's best interests, immediate action be taken to have the vacant posts filled in a streamlined and expedited manner. This will help to ensure that the Office of Internal Oversight Services can perform its mandated functions effectively and efficiently.**

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